
**Education, Dignity, and the Question of Caste:
A Comparative Study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Loka Malahari's
*Untouchable's Education***

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and Loka Malahari's *Untouchable's Education* (1955; trans. 2025) stand as two influential yet distinct interventions in Indian reformist fiction. Anand's novel, written in English during the colonial period, lays bare the dehumanising realities of untouchability through a single day in the life of Bakha. Malahari's Telugu novel, emerging from rural Telangana, carries the reformist conversation forward by foregrounding education as a sustained means of social emancipation. This article presents a comparative reading of the two novels, focusing on their portrayal of caste oppression, narrative structure, ideological orientation, and reformist vision. It argues that while *Untouchable* powerfully captures the immediacy and psychological trauma of caste humiliation, *Untouchable's Education* redirects attention toward consciousness, pedagogy, and long-term social transformation. Read together, the novels chart an evolution in Indian anti-caste thought—from moral exposure to structural intervention—across linguistic, regional, and historical contexts.

Keywords: Mulk Raj Anand, Loka Malahari, *Untouchable*, *Untouchable's Education*, caste and literature, reformist fiction, Indian English literature, translation studies

Introduction

Indian literature has long played a vital role in articulating resistance to caste-based oppression. Among the most significant works in this tradition is Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), widely regarded as a foundational text of Indian English fiction and anti-caste writing. Two decades later, in a different linguistic and regional milieu, Loka Malahari published *Untouchable's Education* (*Jeggani Yidde*, 1955), a Telugu novel grounded in the lived realities of rural Telangana. Despite differences in language, geography, and narrative method, both novels confront the same moral crisis: the systematic denial of dignity to communities labelled as “untouchable.”

This article offers a comparative study of these texts, examining how caste oppression is represented, what solutions are imagined, and how education is understood within each narrative. While Anand's novel presents caste as an immediate moral atrocity that demands ethical outrage, Malahari's work advances a reformist pedagogy that treats education as the primary instrument of social change. Reading these novels together helps trace shifting modes of anti-caste literary intervention in twentieth-century India.

Narrative Structure and Temporal Vision

One of the most striking contrasts between the two novels lies in their narrative structure. *Untouchable* is famously confined to a single day in the life of Bakha, a young sweeper in colonial India. This compressed timeframe intensifies the reader's encounter with humiliation, as Bakha faces abuse, exclusion, and violence in quick succession. Anand's method produces what can be described as an ethics of immediacy: caste oppression appears visceral, relentless, and psychologically crushing.

By contrast, *Untouchable's Education* unfolds over an extended period, charting the gradual intellectual and moral growth of Jegгаду, a Mala boy who dares to imagine a future beyond hereditary servitude. Malahari's narrative is expansive rather than episodic, creating room for dialogue, debate, hesitation, and development. This openness mirrors the novel's ideological stance: social change is not sudden but cumulative, achieved through sustained effort and learning. Thus, while Anand jolts the reader into awareness, Malahari draws the reader into an ongoing process of transformation.

Protagonists: Bakha and Jegгаду

Bakha and Jegгаду embody two distinct responses to caste oppression. Bakha, though sensitive and intelligent, remains largely passive within the narrative. His aspirations are not centred on education or political change but on personal cleanliness, dignity, and acceptance within the existing social order. His admiration for the British and fascination with modernity suggest a desire to escape humiliation rather than to challenge its structural roots.

Jegгаду, in contrast, is clearly oriented toward the future. His insistence on education marks a decisive break from inherited caste roles. Unlike Bakha, who internalises shame, Jegгаду develops critical consciousness. He questions why labouring bodies are denied learning, why caste should determine destiny, and why dignity is treated as a privilege rather than a right. For Jegгаду, education is not imitation of the elite but liberation from fear and ignorance. This contrast points to an ideological shift between the two novels: from endurance and moral appeal in *Untouchable* to agency and reformist assertion in *Untouchable's Education*.

Education as Theme and Strategy

Education occupies a marginal yet symbolic position in Anand's *Untouchable*. Toward the novel's conclusion, Gandhi's speech gestures toward reform, sanitation, and moral regeneration, while the idea of the flushing toilet is offered as a technological

“solution” to untouchability. Education remains implicit rather than central, subsumed under ethical awakening and social goodwill.

In Malahari’s novel, education is the driving force of the narrative. Schooling becomes the space where caste ideology is questioned and reimagined. Teachers such as Purushottam Rao function as ethical reformers who reject caste discrimination and actively mentor marginalised children. Education is portrayed as both intellectual and moral training—learning to read society as much as learning the alphabet.

Crucially, Malahari also exposes resistance to Dalit education not only among dominant castes but within oppressed families themselves, who fear economic loss and social retaliation. In doing so, the novel reveals caste as a deeply internalised system, sustained by fear as much as by force.

Language, Location, and Authenticity

Anand’s decision to write *Untouchable* in English was a strategic one, aimed at reaching both Indian elites and an international audience. His language, though empathetic, is mediated through modernist realism and humanist liberalism. Critics have often observed the presence of an external reformist gaze in the novel.

Untouchable’s Education, originally written in a raw rural Telangana dialect, draws its strength from linguistic intimacy. The use of spoken idiom grounds the novel in lived experience and asserts the cultural authority of marginalised voices. In translation, this linguistic authenticity remains a defining feature, firmly situating the novel within subaltern and regional literary traditions.

Reformist Vision and Ethical Framework

Both novels belong to the reformist tradition, yet their ethical frameworks differ. Anand’s reformism is moral and humanist, seeking empathy, compassion, and ethical shock. Malahari’s reformism is pedagogic and structural, rooted in the belief that education can, over time, dismantle caste hierarchies. If *Untouchable* lays bare the wound, *Untouchable’s Education* suggests a path toward healing.

Conclusion

A comparative reading of *Untouchable* and *Untouchable’s Education* reveals not contradiction but continuity and evolution within Indian anti-caste literature. Anand’s novel remains unmatched in its emotional intensity and ethical urgency, while Malahari’s work extends the reformist project by envisioning education as a sustained route to dignity and equality.

Together, these novels demonstrate how literature can both bear witness to suffering and imagine transformation. By bringing *Untouchable’s Education* into English, contemporary scholarship gains access to a vital regional voice that complements and deepens the canon of Indian English Studies. For journals such as *IJOES*, this comparison

highlights the importance of reading Indian literature across languages, regions, and reformist traditions.

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